DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 390 573 CS 215 353

AUTHOR Magnotto, Joyce Neff
TITLE Grounded Theory: Research as Praxis.
PUB DATE Mar 96
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (47th, Milwaukee, WI, March 27-30, 1996).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classification; Data Analysis; Higher Education; Qualitative Research; *Research Methodology; *Writing Instruction; Writing Laboratories; Writing Research
IDENTIFIERS *Grounded Theory; Theoretical Orientation

ABSTRACT

In the mid-1960s, social scientists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss developed grounded theory as a systematic and rigorous method of qualitative data analysis leading to "the discovery of theory from data." In grounded theory, the researcher applies a set of coding procedures to the data until a provisional theory emerges inductively. During the analytic phase, researchers record their interpretations in integrative memos, visuals, and balancing matrices. Grounded theory was used in a year-long study of a cross-disciplinary writing center and is now being used to study student and faculty perceptions of televised writing instruction. The promise it holds for composition research is significant: (1) it is theory as process, not a perfected product; (2) it goes beyond description to explanation and interpretation; (3) being inclusive, it works well with research teams; (4) it teases out the political and social components affecting writing and teaching; and (5) it is flexible and open so that additional data can be incorporated over time. (Contains a figure representing college writing and eight references.) (TB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Conference on College Composition and Communication
March 27-30, 1996, Milwaukee, WI
Session B.19: Research Methods and Results

Grounded Theory: Research as Praxis

Joyce Neff Magnotto
Old Dominion University
Norfolk, VA 23529-0078
JNM100F@hamlet.bal.odu.edu

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

ED 398 573

Definition & brief history of Grounded Theory:

In the mid 1960s, two social scientists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, developed grounded theory as a systematic and rigorous method of qualitative data analysis leading to "the discovery of theory from data" (The Discovery of Grounded Theory. Chicago: Aldine, 1967, 1). In Grounded Theory, the researcher applies a defined set of coding procedures to the data until a provisional theory emerges inductively. During the analytic phase, researchers record their interpretations in integrative memos, visuals, and balancing matrices. The analyses that survive the coding process have rich, explanatory promise, especially for complicated social practices such as writing and teaching.

My search of the ERIC data base from 1982-94 shows twelve composition studies using Grounded Theory. Some examples: how sixth graders define themselves as readers (Sherry Guice), how veteran teachers reconceived the value of dialogue journals when confronted with student responses to the journals (Patricia Gross), how a novice researcher redefines herself as she produces a dissertation using grounded theory (Kimberly White), and the perceptions of two researchers on their collaborative efforts (Louise M. Smith).

The abstracts of these studies indicate the reflexive nature of Grounded Theory. Researchers using Grounded Theory are always aware of their situatedness within the methodological paradigm. Questioning is not necessarily resolved nor closed by this methodology. People practicing Grounded Theory learn to live without closure, or they find other methodologies better suited to their research styles.

CS215353

Description of the Methodology:

Grounded theory aims to organize the many ideas which emerge from systematic data analysis and then to generate theory which is tested through further recursive analysis. For those of us familiar with the notion of writing as a recursive

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

process, the iterative nature of grounded theory will seem quite familiar.

Actually, in doing Grounded Theory, the activities of collecting data, analyzing data, and writing up the research often occur simultaneously. The process both reflexive and recursive. Researchers usually involve their subjects in the analysis.

All types of data may be collected, both quantitative and qualitative. Analysis begins with the researcher holding conversations with the data and thinking about any regularities or patterns in the data base that relate to the research questions.

Moving toward theory involves coding, memoing, and diagramming procedures that depend on "constant comparison." The two major operations are "unitizing" and "categorizing."

Unitizing means deciding what will constitute a "unit" of information in the data base. In linguistic research this might be a word, clause, t-unit, etc. In writing research, "chunks of meaning" work well as units. The researcher reads the data base and decides where one chunk ends and another begins. Chunks are then labeled to indicate source, type of respondent, site, and episode. The researcher's experience in the site under study (classroom, writing center, etc.) is made use of in these procedures.

Categorizing involves first grouping similar chunks into categories; second, writing rules that describe the category; and third, assigning future chunks or units based on the rule rather than on the "looks like or feels like" procedure used initially.

Anomalies, conflicts, and other inadequacies will become evident. Through additional coding procedures, categories, category names and rules are massaged until Core Categories emerge and can be dimensionalized (agent, tactics/strategies, structural conditions, consequences). Finally the researcher returns to the whole data base for theoretical sampling of the core categories.

Applications:

In 1991, I used Grounded Theory to complete a year-long study of a cross-disciplinary writing center, and I am now using grounded theory to study student and faculty perceptions of televised writing instruction.

In my current study I am developing a matrix of the tensions

instructors and students balance when writing is taught from a distance. The study addresses three questions:

1. What notions of themselves as students do members of a Teletechnet composition course construct?
2. What notions of themselves as writers do members of a Teletechnet composition course construct?
3. What are the implications of distance learning for composition pedagogy?

I am also supervising 12 MA students enrolled in a research seminar on the "sites and scenes of writing." They are applying grounded theory methods to a range of topics:

--Basic Writing in an Alternative School Setting: how students who fail the Va Passport Literacy Test are remediated
--How Children with Autism Learn to Write
--Written Combat Communication: Can We Communicate Intent and Urgency Via Computer Interface
--A Case Study of a Non-fiction Writer
--Case Studies of Writing Apprehension in the READ Program at Norfolk State University
--Writing classified documents in a Department of Defense consulting organization
--How a Teacher's Personal Practice of Writing Informs Her/his Classroom Instruction in Composition
--How a reporter writes articles on AIDS

The promise Grounded Theory holds for Composition Research:

1. Grounded Theory is "theory as process; that is, theory as an ever-developing entity, not as a perfected product" (Glaser & Strauss, Discovery 32).

2. Grounded Theory goes beyond description to explanation, interpretation, and application. In contrast to logically deduced theory that may or may not be based in empirical research, Grounded Theory is "phenomenological" and likely to have better "fit" and "working capacity" to explain things to both researchers and practitioners. (Discovery 4)

3. Grounded Theory is "inclusive" rather than "exclusive." It works well when teams of researchers and practitioners work together (including grad students and the individuals being studied).

4. Grounded Theory promotes the teasing out of political and social components affecting writing/teaching. It doesn't require the hiding or demoting of certain features to make points about other features of a writing site. The balancing

matrices allow multiple factors to be incorporated "at a glance." [look at sample matrix here]

5. Grounded Theory is flexible and open so that additional data, perhaps from additional sites or subjects, can be incorporated over time to enrich the explanatory and predictive power of an emerging theory. Expanding and deepening one's theory becomes the ongoing challenge for the researcher.

Finally, the distinction which Anselm Strauss makes concerning substantive theory and formal theory suggests that Grounded Theory can work to transcend the boundaries between local and general knowledge. Grounded Theory may also offer a means of meta-analysis across studies, and I believe it is an excellent avenue for long-term research agendas that can enrich our discipline.

Suggested Readings

Glaser, Barney G. and Anselm L. Strauss. The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research. Chicago: Aldine, 1967.

Lincoln, Yvonna S. and Egon G. Guba. Naturalistic Inquiry. London: Sage, 1985.

Lather, Patti. "Research as Praxis." Harvard Educational Review 56.3 (Aug. 1986): 257-77.

Magnotto, Joyce Neff. "The Construction of College Writing in a Cross-disciplinary, Community College Writing Center." Diss. U of Pennsylvania, 1991.

Magnotto, Joyce Neff. "Grounded Theory: A Critical Research Methodology for Composition Studies." Composition Research as Critical Practice. Eds. Christine Farris and Chris Anson. (forthcoming)

Spigelman, Candace. "Conflicts of Ownership in Writing Response Groups and Their Revision Practices." Diss. Temple U, 1996.

Strauss, Anselm L. Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists. New York: Cambridge UP, 1987.

Strauss, Anselm and Juliet Corbin. Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990.

Joyce Magnotto
Old Dominion University
(1991)

Figure 1: Representations of College Writing

	Student representations	Tutor representations	Faculty representations	Writing Center Contracts
Audience	Teacher as examiner	(1) Teacher as examiner (2) Interested, non-expert readers	Teacher as examiner	(1) Teacher as examiner (2) Tutor as interested reader (3) Writer as reader
Purpose	To earn a grade by satisfying a professor	(1) To display knowledge (2) To learn content (3) To learn to write (4) To communicate one's views	(1) To test learning (2) To teach content (3) To assist student learning	(1) To satisfy the professor/institution (2) To meet writer & reader needs
Products	Content and form are separable Writing is right or wrong	Content + Form. Professors want deductive, thesis-driven essays, relatively free of error	Formal products "count." Writing-to-learn products "unconvertible." Ideal texts vs student texts	Institutional constraints determine form & content
Process	Linear, mysterious, painful, constrained by slippery rules, solitary Revision = polishing	Recursive, messy HOCS & LOCS Revision = meaning-making	A means to the product rather than a means of developing the writer	Collaborative, social. Strategies can be taught & learned by moving between the particular and general.
Student as writer	Students are students, not writers	Students can also be writers	Unexamined dimension	Students can be constructed as writers

BEST COPY AVAILABLE